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EDITORIAL NOTES

CHARACTER AND EDUCATION

In modern discussions of the ends of education there seems to be an increasing disposition to recognize character as the most comprehensive expression of the ultimate aim. In a general sense there can be no question that the term *character* embodies a large amount of what is commonly recognized as most significant in the outcome of the educational process. But it is to be feared that serious misapprehension will arise through an unduly naïve interpretation of the basis and meaning of character.

If one listens to the average speaker before an audience interested in educational problems, it will generally be found that in assigning the formation of character as the fundamentally important end to be held before teachers, there is in mind primarily the instilling by precept and example of the ordinary maxims of conventional morality. If the schools turn out young people who neither lie nor steal nor are unchaste in thought or deed, they have accomplished their fundamental purpose.

Now no one will question that such results in the lives of our young people are essentially indispensable, if civic integrity and high ideals of personal worth are to prevail among us. But this statement of the case and the view which underlies it is far too simple-minded to do justice either to the complexities of the actual growing human mind on the one hand, or to the unprecedented and wholly novel complications of the existing social order on the other.

If we examine from the side of psychology the growth and significance of character, we find that it is synonymous throughout with the growth of control. This control we find is directed in the first instance to the ordering of certain great impulses or instincts which crop out as natural possessions in every human being, and which require

mutual organization in terms of the proper functions of each. These instincts and impulses represent the great dynamic factors in human life. They supply the energy which keeps the machine going. As essential parts of the mechanism by which control is established we find the great processes of knowledge with their foundations in the activities of sense perception and their superstructure high up in the regions of abstraction and inference. The knowledge process from its simplest to its most complex expressions finds its final significance precisely in the fact of the intelligent control over conduct which it permits. By means of knowledge we are enabled to recall the results of our past impulsive acts, and by means of such recall to plan for and anticipate the future. Experiences which in the past have been chiefly disagreeable and unprofitable are in this process likely to be discouraged. Those of a different character are cultivated and increasingly embodied in our established habits. Clearly, then, from the psychological side alone, to say nothing of the social aspect of the problem, a training of character instead of furnishing us a short cut to the formation of proper educational aims which can be readily applied even by the inexpert, brings us face to face with the problem of disciplining to the fullest degree all the great fundamental aspects of the mind.

A well-trained character is not simply one which can be trusted neither to lie, nor to steal; it is one which in these perplexing days of changing standards and ideals can justly discern wherein stealing and lying consist. The established industrial order under which we are living countenances and encourages through the process of competition forms of human suffering which not a few leaders of social reform stigmatize as essentially theft and murder. Without assenting to the extremer interpretations of these conditions, it should be perfectly clear that one of the results which modern education should achieve for those who receive it is the ability freshly to face such problems as these and pass intelligent judgment as to the exact lines of distinction between the right and the wrong. Such capacity means fineness of intellect and fineness of feeling and indomit-

**In Practice
Character
Means Ability
to Form New
Moral Judgments**

able energy of will. It means, in short, rich and fully developed character.

We assent, therefore, enthusiastically to the proposition that character is the most fundamental of the ends of education, but we protest against any interpretation of this dictum which would find in the formula a cheap and easy road to educational expediency instead of recognizing, what is the fact, that such a definition points to the hard but lofty pathway of the most difficult educational idealism.

**Character the
Achievement
of the
Whole
Educational
Process**

J. R. A.